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## Geffray MYNSHUL AND THOMAS DEKKER

In 1618 was published a little volume entitled "Essayes and Characters of a Prison and Prisoners. Written by G. M. of Grayes-Inne. Gent."<sup>1</sup> It had been entered on the Stationers' Register February 11, 1618. There is evidence that the book, in the earliest form in which it has come down to us, is a second edition, and that the first edition was more or less anonymous. The first of the three epistles, dated June 6, 1618, and addressed to the Young Gentlemen of Gray's Inn, repeatedly refers to what seems to have been an earlier version: "Once more I wash over the picture which was drawne but the Tearme going before;" "I come now not to re-sing, but to re-cant the errours both of my pen and judgment;" "that one poore paper bullet of which I shot up and downe Fleetestreet." This epistle tells us also that the author has announced his name: "I have now put my name to my Book, (without tergeversation or turne coating the letters," but it is signed G. M. The second epistle, addressed to the author's uncle, is dated nearly five months earlier, January 27, 1617 (i. e. 1618), and speaks of the book as the writer's "first-borne," but, in accordance with the statement made in the first epistle, it is subscribed "Geffray Mynshul." Both epistles were written in King's Bench Prison, in Southwark.

Of Geffray Mynshul "of Grayes-Inne, Gent." nothing is certainly known except what may be gathered from the epistle "To his most loving and ever respective kind uncle, Mr. Mathew Mainwaring, of Namptwich, in Cheshire;" namely, that he was in prison for debt, and that his uncle had always been his "anchor" when he had previously been "ship-wrackt;" but it has been conjectured that he was identical with the "Geffery Minshull" mentioned as among the knights, esquires, gentlemen, and freeholders of the County Palatine of Chester, in the Hundred of Nantwich.<sup>2</sup>

Mynshul's book has no table of contents and is not divided into chapters; but the headings of the sections are as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by Ballantyne and Co. 1821.

<sup>2</sup> "Notice" prefixed to the edition of 1821, p. viii.

Of a Prison; The Character of a Prison; Of Prisoners; Prisoners of another Nature; The Character of a Prisoner; Of Creditors; The Character of a Creditor; Of Choice of Company in Prison; The Character of Companions in Prison; Of Visitants in Prison; The Character of Visitants; Of Entertainment in Prison; Of Keepers which goe abroad with Prisoners; The Character of Keepers; Essayes and Characters of Jaylors and Keepers of Prison; Of Mercilesse Jaylors; Of the Miserable Life in Prison; A Locker up at Nights; A noble understanding Prisoner; Observations of a Prison.

Now one of Mynshul's companions in prison was Thomas Dekker who, according to his own testimony, lay in that "cave of horrors" for a period of almost seven years closing in 1619 or 1620.<sup>3</sup> That the Prison was the King's Bench appears from a letter to Edward Alleyn, written September 12, 1616.<sup>4</sup> During the year in which that letter was written, Dekker brought out a fifth edition of his popular "Lanthorn and Candlelight" under the title: "Villanies Discovered by Lanthorne and Candlelight, and the helpe of a new Cryer called 0 per se 0. Being an addition to the Bel-mans second night-walke: and laying open to the world of those abuses, which the Bel-man (because he went i'th darke) could not see. With Canting Songs, and other new conceits never before Printed. Newly corrected and enlarged by the Author."<sup>5</sup> The address

<sup>3</sup> See epistles to Endymion Porter and "the Reader" prefixed to "Dekker, His Dream," 1620, found in Vol. iii of Grosart's "Non-dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker."

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Collier's "Memoirs of Edward Alleyn."

<sup>5</sup> I have not seen this edition; but there is in the British Museum a copy of the 1612 edition, which has on the fly-leaf preceding the title-page, a note by the former owner, Mr. Heber, from which I make the following extracts: "Another edition of this book was printed for John Busby in 1616 intituled 'Villanies discovered by Lanthorne and candlelight & the help of a new cryer called o per se o,' etc. . . I find it is increased by the addition of a whole section 'Of a Prison' occupying 6 chapters . . . Ed. 1620 is an exact reprint of ed. 1616."

I have used the edition of 1620. There is internal evidence that the additions made in 1616 remained unchanged, for in ch. xi, unpagged, Dekker speaks of his imprisonment as lasting about three years.

The extracts from the 1620 ed. I owe to the courtesy of Dr. Carl Van Doren of Columbia University.

“To the Reader” is altered from that of the last preceding edition, that of 1612, by the omission of the scornful little paragraph about the Beadle of Bridewell (Samuel Rowlands), and the addition of the following sentence: “To furnish this Army the better with souldiers have I opened a Prison, out of which what troopes issue and how practised in discipline, let but a drum beate to call up the reare, & thou shalt easily in one light skirmish know of what mettle they are.”

This promise is made good by the insertion of a new section entitled “Of a Prison,” made up of six chapters under the headings: Certaine Discoveries of a Prison by way of Essayes and Characters, written by a Prisoner; Of Prisoners; Of Creditors; Of Choice of Company in Prison; Of Visitants; Of Jaylors.

A comparison of Dekker’s Prison chapters with Mynshul’s book, published two years later, reveals the fact that not only are the same subjects discussed under similar titles and in the same order, but that whole passages are identical, or nearly so, in thought, figure, and turn of phrase. I quote the following illustrations:

DEKKER  
1616

I am with dimme water colours to line a Cart, and in it to lay downe the bounds of those tempestuous seas, in which ten thousand are every day tossed, if not overwhelmed. Some doe but crosse over the waters and are Seasicke; but not Heart-sicke. Such are happy: To others it is longer than an East-Indian voyage, and farre more dangerous. For in that, if of threescore men, twenty come home, it is wel. But in this, if fourscore of a hundred be

MYNSHUL  
1618

My purpose is, with dim water-colours to line me out a heart, yea such a heart, so discontented and oppressed, that I need not be curious in fitting every colour to his place, or to chuse the pleasantest chamber to draw it in, because in it I am to lay downe the bounds of those tempestuous seas, in which tenne thousands are every day tossed, if not overwhelmed — — — — —

My travels hither to this infernall iland hath been but a

not cast overboard, it is a wonder.

More now than a three-yeeres-voyage have I made to these infortunate Ilands: a long lying have I had under Hatches, during which time, my Compasse never went true. No Star of comfort have I sailed by: no Anchor to cast out. Top-saile, Sprit—saile, Mizzen, Mayne-sheat, Botlings, & Drablers are all torne by the windes: & the Barque itselfe so weather-beaten, that I fear it shall never touch at the Cape Bona Speranza. —

— — — — —

A Fly-boat hath brooked that Sea in which an Argozy hath beene drowned: for the greatest courages are here wrack'd: the fairest revenewes do here run aground: the noblest wits are here confounded.

So that I may call a Prison an Inchanted Castle, by reason of the Rare Transformations therein wrought: for it makes a wise man loose his wits, a foole to know himselfe. It turnes a rich man into a beggar, and leaves a poore man desperate.

He whom neither Snowes nor Alpes can vanquish, but hath a heart as constant as

short voyage, and my abode here as yet but a few moneths, but it seems longer to mee then an East-Indian voyage, and I am sure farre more dangerous: for if from the Indies of sixty men twenty come home safe it is well; but in this, if eighty of an hundred be not cast over board it is a wonder.

Being once arrived, no starre of comfort here can be seene to saeyle by, no haven of happiness neare, no anchor of hope to cast out, top-sayle, fore-sayle, sprit-sayle, mizen, maine sheate, bollings, and drablers are all torne by the windes, and the barke it selfe so weather beaten, that there is few can come neare to touch at the Cape of Bona Speranza.

Being once arrived at, all are not onely staid, but the inchantments are so strong, that it transformeth all that come thither. First, the greatest courages are here wracked, the fairest revenues doe here come aground; it maketh a wise man to lose his wits a foole to know himselfe, it turnes a rich man into a begger, and leaves a poore man desperate; he whom neyther snowes nor Alpes can vanquish, but hath a heart as

Hannibals, him can the misery of a prison direct.

It behooveth a Prisoner to say as Caesar did to the Pilot, when he was afraid, (thou carriest, quoth he, Caesar) so every generous minde ought to be armed with noble resolutions, to meete all stormes of adversitie — — — — —

Varlets and Catch-poles arrest thee: Fret not at it: if the Law hath power to whet an Axe; she must pick a Hangman to smite. The Mace that arresteth thee, is in a hand Omnipotent — — — — An action is brought against thee onely to draw thee to a reckoning, and make thee know what thou owest to Heaven, as well as to man. Thou art beaten with a Rod, not to draw bloud but teares; not to drive thee into dispaire, but amendment. — — —

I verily thinke that the bravest spirited Prisoner in the world, would with a cheerful looke thrust his neck into the yoke of Adversitie, and manfully defie the threats of

constant as *Hannibal*, him can the miseries of a prison overcome.<sup>6</sup>

After stormes calmes will arise, and though sorrow be over night, yet joy will come in the morning; and to say as *Caesar* did to the pilot that carryed him when hee was afraid; quoth he, *Thou carriest Caesar*. So every generous minde ought to be arm'd with resolution to meete all stormes of adversitie<sup>7</sup> — — — — —

Varlets and catchpoles arrest thee, fret not at it, if law have power to whet an axe, she must pick out a hangman to strike the mace — — — — It [the processes of the law] doth but teach thee, that thy accounts must be brought **against thee**, to draw thee to a **reckoning**, to make thee know that thou owest a reckoning to Heaven as well as to man, and justice will execute her power, not to drive thee to dispaire, but to amendement.

Further, I persuaide myselfe there are many prisoners whose resolutions are so noble, that before they would yeeld to the threats of an insulting creditour, they would cheerfully thrust their neckes

<sup>6</sup> Mynshul, pp. 12-14.

<sup>7</sup> p. 18.

an insulting Creditor, were not more veines to be cut then his own. But the poorest wretch dying in a prison, hath some or other lying in the Coffin with him: with thine eye-strings (whosoever thou art) crack at the last gasp the heart-strings of a wife, of children, of a father, or mother, of friends or allies. For these art thou bound in the bonds of Nature, to take pittie of thy selfe, and to hang out a flag of truce to thy bloody minded Creditor & for Ransome to pay all, so thou maist march away with life onely. But say thou hast none of these respects to tie thee yeelding. Thou art a Traytor to thy Countrey, if thou givest up thy selfe into thy enemies hands, when upon noble tearmes thy peace may be made. Live not in a Prison, but come forth that thou mayest benefite thy selfe, dye not there, but live that thou mayest doe service to thy Country. Pay thy debts so farre as thou canst, because the most heaue debts that ever thy Soule did owe, were paid for thee.

A Creditor hath two paire of hands, one of flesh and blood which Nature gives him,

into the yoke of adversity if no more veynes herein were cut but their owne; but here is none so poor which dyes in prison, but the last gaspe doth cracke the heart-strings of a wife, children, father, mother, friends, or allies; therefore art thou bound to take pittie of thy selfe, and to hang out the flag of truce to thy bloody-minded creditor, and seeke for ransome to pay all, so that thou maist escape with life, though it be upon some ignoble termes, and much losse to thee; if none of these respects, yet for thy countrie's sake, to whom thou art a traytor, if thou give thy selfe to thine enemies hand, when upon parley thy peace may be made, come forth of prison, and dye not there, that thou mayst honour thy King, and doe service to thy countrey, and pay thy debts so farre as thou art able, because the greatest debt that ever thou didst owe, was paid for thee.<sup>a</sup>

A *creditor* hath two paire of hands, one of flesh and blood, and that nature gave

<sup>a</sup> pp. 20-22.

another of yron which the Law gives him — — Of these two the lesse hath power over the great; the soft warmth of the one, being able to melt the hardnesse of the other. And that never happens but when Grace and Mercy kisse Law and Justice. Such dayes are seldome set downe in common Calendars; for a strange Meridian is that *Almanacke* calculated in which they are found.

And yet I have seen a Creditor in a Prison weepe when he beheld the Debtor, and to lay out money of his owne purse to free him: he shot a second Arrow to finde the first. But suppose he shot both away; thinke you his sheafe was the lesse, or Quiver more emptie? No: I believe he scattered a handful of Corne, and reaped a Bushell he laid out, and God paid. — — — / Thou that art a Creditor, wilt not believe this: Doe not: But in stead of that mans weeping, make thou thy Debtor melt into teares. — — — — — Doest thou not sleepe upon the pillowe of thine owne damnation? That prayer to God is a curse upon thy selfe. Thou mockest him to whom thou prayest: but he will not mocke thee.

him; another of iron, and that the law gives him — — — — But if hee once consider — — — — then the softnesse of the one doth so operate, that it meets with the hardness of the other, which never comes to passe, but when Grace and Mercy kisse Law and Justice; but such dayes are seldome set downe in our calenders, but I perswade myselfe that for a strange meridian is that *almanacke* calculated in which they are found. — — — I thinke I should nominate but one onely, and onely one of a mercifull brest, who did not onely grieve to see his debtor opprest with misery, but also laid money out of his purse to free him, he shot a second arrow to find the first, and suppose he shot both away, doe you think his quiver was the emptier? No, he scattered a handfull of corne, and reaped a bushell — — — — — God became his debtor, and paid him more than his accompt came to.

Thou that art a creditor wilt not beleeeve this; doe not. But in stead of this man's weeping make thy debtor melt into teares — — — — — Dost thou not sleepe on the pillow of thy owne damnation, thy prayers turn into



cursings, and thou dost but  
mocke him that thou prayest  
to.<sup>9</sup>

Thou takest (with one clap  
of a Varlets hand) from the  
Courtier, his Honor: from  
the Lawyer his tongue: from  
the Merchant the Seas: from  
the Citizen his credit: from  
the Scholler his preferment:  
from the Husbandman the  
Earth itselfe: from all men,  
(so much as thou canst) the  
very brightnesse and warmth  
of the Sunne in heaven. — —  
— — In being cruell to thy  
Debtor, thou art worse then  
a common Hangman; He be-  
fore he strikes begges for-  
givenesse. Thou takest a  
pride to condemne, when thou  
mayest save; and (Nero-like)  
dauncest, when the most glo-  
rious Cittie is on fire.

But it may be thy private  
estate is sicke, and weakely;  
and thou to Physicke it, art  
compelled to breake into Gar-  
dens of thine owne, which are  
locked from thee by other  
mens hands. In doing this,  
thou doest well: If any weare  
thy coate, and thyselfe goest a  
cold, thou art not to be blamed  
if thou plucke it off from his  
shoulders. But if hee that  
borrowed thy coate, hath now  
worne it out, and hath not a

Thou takest with one clap  
of a varlet's hand, from the  
courtier his honour, from the  
lawyer his tongue, from the  
merchant the seas, from the  
citizen his credit, from the  
scholler his preferment, from  
the husbandman the earth it  
selfe, and from all men, (as  
much as thou maist,) the  
brightnesse and warmth of  
the sunne of heaven. In a  
word, if nothing will make  
thy stony heart relent, thou  
in being cruell to thy debtor  
art worse then the hang-man;  
hee before he strikes begs par-  
don, thou takest a pride to  
condemne where thou maist  
save.

But it may be thy estate is  
sicke, thy credit much in-  
gaged, and to save thy selfe  
thou art forced to doe this.

In so doing thou doest well;  
if another weare thy coate,  
and thou goest cold, thou  
maist plucke it from his  
shoulders. — — — — —

— — — — —  
But if he which hath bor-  
rowed thy coate hath worne  
it out, and hath not a ragge  
to cover him with, wilt thou  
trample upon his naked body?

<sup>9</sup> pp. 25-28.

ragge to cover him, wilt thou trample upon his naked bo-some. If with the Jew (instead of money) thou de-maundest a pound of flesh, next to thy Debtors heart, wouldst thou cut him in pieces. If he offer to give thee the bed he lyes on, the dish he drinks in, his owne chamber for thee to sleepe in (and to sit shivering in the cold.) If he turne himselfe, Wife, and Children as poore into the world, as they are to go out of it (nay not so rich neither by a sheet) and that he leave himselfe nothing to pay thee all, wilt thou for all this suffer him to die in the hands of the Lawe. — — — — — To be tender-hearted to him that cannot pay thee, what is it? Is it any more than to lift a sicke man upright upon his pillow, & to give him a little more ease. That man may recover and doe as much for thee.

Society is the string at which the life of man hangs, without it is no musicke; two in this make but an Unyson.

Adam had his Eve. And every son of Adam hath a brother, whom he loves. No Charyot runnes with one wheele, two make it steady,

If with the Jew of Malta, instead of coyne, thou requir-est a pound of flesh next to thy debtor's heart, wilt thou cut him in pieces? If thy debtor offers thee his bed hee lyes in, his chamber he sleeps in, his dish hee drinks in; nay, all that he hath, so that he leaves himselfe, wife, and children as naked as they came into the world, wilt thou for all this suffer him to lye in prison? If thou be merciful to thy debtor that cannot pay thee, alas, what is it? No more then if thou shouldest lift up the head of a sicke man upon his pillow to ease him, he may recover and doe as much for thee.<sup>10</sup>

Society is the string at which the life of man hang-eth, without which is no musicke, two in this maske is but a union; Adam had his Eve, and every sonne of Adam hath his brother whom he loves.

No chariot runs with one

<sup>10</sup> pp. 30-32.

a third is superfluous, foure too cumbersome. Thou must choose one and but one: who walkes alone is lame.

Men of all conditions are forced into a Prison: as all sorts of Rivers fall into the Sea, and when two meete, the current is more swift and easie. — — — — —  
— — — My counsell then is, that thou be sociable to all: acquainted with few: trust not to any, or if any (I sing the first, note) not above one: and first make triall what the vessell holds; before thou pourest thy selfe into it.

To be a Bowle for every Alley, and runne into all companies, proves thy mind to have no Byas. It is like a Traveller, who in severall countries, takes up many lodgings, and hath a thousand welcomes, but they are not to him but his money.

— — — — —  
Art thou conversant with an Atheist? Thy name will be enrolled on the same Fyle: Is thy companion a miserable base fellow? Niggardlinesse will hold her fingers on thy purse strings. The fellowship of Prodigals will draw thee to Ryot; of Adulterers to Lust; of Swearers, to dammd oaths; of Pot companions, to drunkennesse.

whee, two makes it stedd, a third is superfluous, foure too cumbersome: thou must choose one and but one, who walkes alone is lame.

Men of all conditions are forced into prison, as all rivers run into the sea; therefore it is good to bee familiar with all, acquainted with few, and if with any, *eandem cantilenam cano*, but with one, make triall what the vessell will hold, before thou powre thy selfe into him — — — — —

Bee wary, therefore, of thy company, for to be a bowle for every alley, and run into every company, proves thy mind to have no bias.

Thy comming into prison, is like a traveller comming into strange countries, who take up severall lodgings, hath many welcomes, but they are not to him but to his money.

— — — — —  
Let not thy companion be a miserable, base-minded fellow, for then niggardlinesse will hold her fingers on thy purse-strings; let him not be a prodigall, for then he will draw thee to riot; if adulterer, to lust; if a swearer, to damned oaths; if a pot companion, to drunkennesse; acquaint thyselfe, therefore, not with the most but best, not the best in cloaths or money, but

Acquaint thy selfe therefore not with the most, but the best: not the best in cloathes or money, but the best in doing best, or doing well. Are there none such in prison? Keepe companie then with thy selfe, and in thy chamber talke with Plutarch or Seneca: the one will teach thee to live well, the other to dye well.

From a ruinous house every man flies. They that aske every day (abroad) how thou doest (when thou art in prison) and protest they are sorry for thy misfortunes, yet never come to thee: are like idle passengers pressing about a Barbers doore, when a man is carried in wounded. They peepe in and climbe about the windowes, but dare not enter into the shop, for feare they should swound to see him drest. A Prisoner is as much beholden to such leape-frog acquaintance, as a man shaken with an Ague is to every gossiping woman he meets: He shall have five hundred medicines taught him for one disease, and not one worth the taking.

If thou walkest abroad with a Keeper use him friend-

in vertue; if there bee none such in prison, then keepe company with thy selfe; in thy chamber keepe company with Plutarke, and Seneca, Perkins, and Greenbam; the one will teach thee to live well, the other to dye well.<sup>11</sup>

From a ruinous house every man flyes: they that are abroad aske every day how thou doest; when in prison they protest they are sorry for thy misfortunes, but never come to thee: such are like idle passengers pressing about a barber's shop, when a man is carryed in wounded, who will peepe in and climbe about the windows, but dare not enter into the shop for feare they should fall into a swound to see him drest. A prisoner is as much beholden to such leape-frogge acquaintance, as a man shaken with an ague is to every gossiping woman hee meetes, who will teach him an hundred medicines, and not one worth taking.<sup>12</sup>

If thou walkest abroad with thy keeper, use him friendly,

<sup>11</sup> pp. 38-40.

<sup>12</sup> pp. 44-45.

ly, but not respectively. So mannage him, that he may thinke himselfe beholden to thee, not thou to him. For howsoever he fawnes upon thee with complementall standing bare, and officious attendance, yet know he serves in his place, but as the Dogge the Butcher.

He is to thee as a Curre to a drove: if thou goest on quietly (be it to the slaughter amongst griping Lawyers, and cruel adversaries) he waits gently and brings thee to the very doore: But if thou offer to stray, he worries thee.

Remember his eye shootes at two whites. Thy Person and thy Purse. The one he is to guard, the other must finde him. Thou art compelled to protect thy carkassè under his shelter, as a sheepe under a bryer (in a terrible storm,) & be sure for thy standing there, to have some of thy wooll torne off.

but not respectively; so manage him that he shall rather thinke himselfe beholding to thee then thou to him; for howsoever he faunes upon thee with complements, standing bare with officious attendance, yet know he serves in his place but as the dog the butcher; he is to thee as a cur to a drove of beasts; if thou goest on quietly (be it to thy slaughter among griping cittizens, and cruell creditors to worke thy own freedome) hee waites gently and brings thee to the doore, but if thou once offer to stray hee worries thee.

Remember his eye shootes at two whites, thy person and thy purse; the one is to guard thee, the other to feed him; thou art compelled to protect thy carkase under his shelter as a sheepe in a terrible storme under a bryer, and be sure thy standing there is to have some of thy wooll torne off.<sup>13</sup>

It should be added that in spirit and general treatment, the sections on "Jaylors" offer the greatest dissimilarity, and that the last third of Mynshul's book corresponds to nothing in Dekker's.

"pp. 55-56.

In 1632<sup>14</sup> Dekker substituted for the prison reflections of 1616 a narrative dealing with prison life, carefully integrated with the rest of the book—"English Villanies," as "Villanies Discovered" was then rechristened. These new chapters possess greater literary merit and a serener moral temper than the section they displace.<sup>15</sup>

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MARY LELAND HUNT.

<sup>14</sup> It has been impossible to trace a copy of this edition, but the edition of 1638 offers internal evidence that it is a reprint of that of 1632. This is Fleay's opinion.

<sup>15</sup> This narrative, as well as the 1616 prison chapters not quoted above, I have used freely in a monograph (Columbia University Press) on Thomas Dekker. The Mynshul matter is briefly discussed on pages 169-170.